

teaching in high school or college, to determine what essentials that child is to study, and it is not for the college to specify arbitrarily. When these essentials are taught effectively and the college has a right to expect the high school to do that, the college may well cease to concern itself with what the student has studied and turn its attention to how skillfully and how easily he has learned. If the college is to be anything more than a continuation of the high school, it may as yet be a prediction to say that the child best prepared for college is the one who is capable of using his knowledge in a social situation to solve the problems of his maturity. He will excel the one who presents himself to the college doors with a head full of facts and a declaration of "I have had"—all in the past tense. I say it may now be a prediction; but it may well become a truism.

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### HOW MUCH GRAMMAR IN THE HIGH SCHOOL?

**T**HE subject which I have been asked to speak briefly about is "How Much Grammar in the High School?" Last year one of our little girls wrote a play which she called "Slippery Business"—a title which, I think, might be a suitable designation for the business of teaching grammar. Indeed, so problematic is this business of teaching grammar that I am reminded of Tennyson's little verse, "Flower in the Crannied Wall," which, you remember, concludes:

. . . . if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

After working early and late upon a unit on verb usage our teacher of grammar teaches the unit as carefully as she can and two days after its conclusion hears one of her pupils shout, "He never done it!" At such a time we all feel that if we knew how to

develop within three or four weeks language habits which would supercede undesirable ones, we should know "what God and man is."

I have long wished that a group of English teachers from Virginia high schools might sit down with a group of college teachers of English for a lengthy and an informal discussion of our intentions and results, and also for the purpose of articulating a list of specific grammar objectives to be set up for various levels of the high school and for the college freshman. I earnestly hope that such an effort will be made soon.

However, most of us are sufficiently experienced not to be misled by mirages. We realize that when we set up grammar goals for different levels of achievement in the secondary school we have only begun an effort to name our problem. For grammar is a slippery business, and goals definitely tabulated have ways of seeming to disperse before our eyes, or of showing themselves inextricably bound with others. Therefore, in reply to our question, "How Much Grammar in the High School?" I say, first that a set of specific goals is desirable and will aid us greatly in clarifying our problem, but, second, that grammar is a slippery business, that a set of goals can never be the final solution to our problem, and, third, that our goals as well as our technique must become much more experimental.

For a decade or more we have witnessed the slow death of formal and scientific grammar pursued with a passion for scientific exactitude. We feel now that most of our grammar teaching in high school should be done through sufficient practice to inculcate permanent habits. The teacher of functional grammar keeps a set of compositions on file and watches week by week the pupil's demonstration in his writing of grammatical principles learned in the regular grammar class. Lengthy arguments

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fired at random into the air no longer illustrate the grammar-teaching situation. The result of this new emphasis upon the usability of grammar we are calling functional grammar.

Now if we assume an experimental attitude toward the problem of how much grammar, our reply is two-fold: (1) Let society through language usage set the desired language goals; and, (2) let the pupil, doing his best, set the goal of amount. I repeat. The question is: How much grammar shall we teach in the high school? and the answer is dual. Let social usage establish the kind and number of goals and let the pupil's powers of learning establish the degree or amount of adaptation.

Perhaps you are wondering what goals I should leave to the college. To the college freshman course I would leave formal grammar, a theoretical interpretation and tying together of habits established earlier in the elementary and the secondary schools. We are not all convinced that it is desirable for everyone to go to college. Certainly large numbers of young people in this state do not go to college. My belief is that the high school grammar course should be designed to provide its graduates with the minimum essentials of language facility in an average social level. The secondary school course must not depend upon the college to do much toward inculcating minimum essentials of the language level used by the mythical "average" man. And it is my belief that if we discard textbooks of formal grammar, grammar taught for logical completeness, and if we adopt an attitude purely experimental, grammar will become a much less slippery business than it is now, and we shall all be surprised by the unanimity of our discoveries.

If we agree to allow social usage to establish our language goals, we must examine *social usage*. Several important studies bearing upon usage await us. One is Mr. Krapp's *Comprehensive Guide to*

*Good English*. Fowler's *Modern Usage* is another, while we can not ignore *The American Language*, by Mr. Mencken. Of still more significance, though, is "How Much English Grammar?" by Stormzand and O'Shea (Warwick and York Co., Inc., Baltimore, 1924). These two gentlemen, while teaching in the University of Wisconsin, studied the question of grammar objectives in the light of present-day usage. They examined contemporary usage in all types of modern prose from classical essays to light fiction and the daily newspapers, as well as usage in papers done by elementary and high school pupils and university students. From ten thousand sentences of a heterogeneous nature was compiled a list of language constructions used most often. Thus you see that these gentlemen were not concerned with an error count or the securing of a list of "don'ts" but with a count of constructions used most frequently in general discourse. From the findings of this study we may glance at a few recommendations. It appears that the following aspects of grammar are *not* justified in functional course:

1. Classification of sentences according to meaning.
2. Classification of *kinds* of adverbial and noun clauses.
3. The various infinitive constructions, especially substantive infinitives.
4. Gerunds.
5. Case construction of nouns.
6. Classification of nouns and pronouns.
7. Subjunctive form of verbs.
8. All non-future uses of "shall" and "will."
9. Comparison of adjectives.
10. Classification of adverbs.

Aspects of grammar found in the light of usage to be of the utmost practical value are:

1. Classification of sentences according to form.

2. Prolonged practice upon the dependent clause in sentence manipulation.
3. Extensive practice upon the participle as a means to control the sentence.
4. Case constructions of pronouns.
5. Transitive verbs with pronoun objects.
6. Transitive verbs instead of intransitive and copulative ones.
7. Emphasis upon voice for acquiring a flexible style.
8. Prolonged attention to the use of the simple present and past tenses with little attention to perfect tenses.
9. Drills upon irregular verb forms in sentences.
10. Voluminous drill work on uses of conjunctions in showing thought relations.

Without minimizing the problem, I wish to call your attention to the fact that this list of language adaptations compiled upon the basis of widespread usage is much shorter and much less formidable than we might have expected it to be. Probably our problem is not as much one of too many goals, but rather one of prolonged and functional attention to a few key habits.

In a discussion of grammar objectives one usually hears much of error counts. All of you know something of the famous Charters error count taken in the sixth and seventh grades of the Kansas City schools. Your attention is called to two conclusions regarding the use of error counts in constructing a list of grammar goals:

I. Mr. Charters found that the validity of an error count is not increased by volume of material. On the other hand, a relatively small amount of work done by your pupils will give an accurate index of the relative importance of various errors for any particular group. A single paper of 150 words from each pupil is sufficient material for each of us to determine dependable conclusions.

II. Error counts are not the intelligent basis for a grammar course because most of the highest ranking errors are errors of

carelessness rather than of ignorance. The error count made by Roy Ivan Johnson of 132 high school freshmen shows the highest percentage of error in spelling, the next highest in punctuation, the next highest in careless omission or repetition. Thus a course of study based upon this error count would give three times as much attention to spelling as to sentence structure. An error count supplies a valuable basis for remedial supervision or perhaps one unit on miscellaneous details, but a course of study in grammar based upon error counts alone would be unwise.

Thus far in this discussion of "How Much Grammar Shall the High School Teach?" I have endeavored to indicate my belief that we cannot profitably begin by laying down an arbitrary set of objectives, that the aim of the high school course must be primarily functional grammar, that any list of goals should grow out of a constructive study of language needs similar in its method to the study by Stormzand and O'Shea, and that error counts should not be relied upon to influence in a large way the formulating of such a set of goals. All these problems are related to the administration and the teacher of grammar. There is, however, another angle to the problem, and that is the individual pupil. Let us ask the pupil "How Much Grammar?"

By this I mean that pupils can be trusted to set their own degrees of attainment. Today we are tossed constantly upon the horns of a great educational dilemma. Two conflicting philosophies and psychologies of learning draw us first one way, then the other, in establishing standards of achievement. One school proclaims that there are no half-way stops in learning: that the pupil either masters completely, so that he can use 100% what he has learned, or that he has not learned. Mr. Morrison is our great exponent of the 100% mastery psychology. Again, another group advocates the use of the median and the standard deviation as

set by the pupils themselves. The evaluating of proficiency is not made upon the basis of a 100% absolutism but instead upon the basis of an average attainment set by the pupils and upon the extent to which pupils rise above or fall below this average. If we grammar teachers are to maintain our equilibrium, I believe that we must give up the ideal of absolutism and follow the standard deviation method. Thus considering the individual pupils in answer to the question, "How Much Grammar?" I would say, how much water shall we put into a given vessel? As much as it will hold. Let us give the pupil as much as he can absorb and let us depend upon him to establish his capacity.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to buy standardized tests with national norms or medians can very easily maintain a balance in this matter of allowing the pupils to set their own standards of achievement. We have available today several excellent English tests which we can use from time to time in an effort to compare our results with those of other schools. Such tests as the Columbia University English Test, the Tressler tests, the Pressey tests, the Cross test, and the Iowa Language tests have been compiled by experts and seem usually to test the right thing in the right way. While I believe that in several instances the norms published with these tests are too low for us to accept them as our objective, yet these norms will undoubtedly rise as English teaching is placed upon a more scientific basis and the tests are used more widely. However, if you can not purchase standardized tests occasionally in order to check up on your local situation you can formulate your own test upon your own objectives and by keeping statistics and adding figures after each testing program, gradually evolve a pretty sound set of norms for your own school. Please do not misunderstand my lengthy reference here to tests. I have said above that the teacher of functional grammar realizes that the real test comes in writing a

personal letter outside school or in a telephone conversation. But there is always, however much we deplore it, a gap between what the pupil actually learns and what the teacher thinks he learns. I have only suggested that in answering the question of how much grammar we remember the individual pupil. When setting up goals for him to achieve, we can well afford to keep an eye upon his degree of attainment as a standardized test shows it. The only way in which it can be a mistake to evaluate the progress of children on the probability curve is for a majority of children to refuse on a test to do their best—a most unlikely situation.

There remains one other aspect of the grammar course in high school. I have recommended that a secondary school grammar curriculum be primarily functional and constructive, and that it shun the practice of hair-splitting analyses of substantive infinitives and mental gymnastics which used to characterize it when we studied and discussed grammar but did little writing, at the same time too when our rhetoric course consisted mainly of the memorizing of definitions for unity, coherence, emphasis, and ease. Is there then no need for scientific grammar in the high school? Should we never teach gerunds, compound tenses, and noun clauses? Such a course is, I believe, highly desirable in the Senior year. Such functional usages as I have described earlier are our goals in the Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior years. A more or less formal study of grammar using such a book as Kittredge and Farley should tie up loose ends and clarify by naming them some of the things which before this time the pupil has done more or less unknowingly. Nor should such a study be intermingled with a literature course. The best results in formal grammar can be achieved when the pupils do intensive studying and drilling for a period of three months during their last year in the secondary school.

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